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ABSTRACT

Developments in higher education in Oklahoma are considered from the governor's standpoint. Oklahoma has ranked fourth in the nation for two years in the percentage of increases of state support for higher education, and in real dollars, the state's educational program has had an increase of 24 percent, far outstripping inflation. After increasing educational opportunity, there now is a mandate to set priorities, to reach for areas of excellence in certain institutions and in certain program areas. One area of concern is that more teachers are being trained than can be absorbed in the state. Responses might be to raise the standards for applicants to teacher education programs and to use college education faculty to provide inservice training to public school teachers. While it is financially difficult to attract the most accomplished scholars, Oklahoma does have a program to bring these people to campuses in the states for brief periods to provide students a first-hand exposure. It is proposed that there is a need to utilize the skills of faculty members in helping to make decisions in the community and in working more direcly in educational policy formation. The importance of the spirit of community in society is emphasized. (SW)

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DAVID L. BOREN

Governor of Oklahoma

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
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SHEEO

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Remarks

By

The Honorable David L. Boren
Governor Of Oklahoma

I am delighted to have this chance to talk with a group of legislators, educators, educational administrators and regents. I think it's a wonderful thing for this group to come together to share experiences and ideas, and I certainly feel at home in this group. As was mentioned, I was a faculty member in higher education before I became Governor. In fact, I am a tenured faculty member on leave of absence, I am happy to say.

Shortly after I became Governor, the trustees of the university where I was teaching took a look at the job I was doing as Governor and decided I might need a job at the end of four years, so they left a place open for me. I really appreciate that. Also there are a number of people that have strong feelings about my participation in education. In fact, the longer that I serve as Governor, the more people there are (and it really warms my heart) who suggest in a very insistent manner that it is time for me to return to higher education. I miss the experience of the classroom. There are mornings in the Governor's office when I think that I would rather be back in the classroom and I think, "What's a nice fellow like me doing in a place like this?" I do miss it and I am delighted to welcome you here for this conference.

In the 1976 fall semester, we had 127,500 students in our State System of Higher Education. We have 27 colleges and universities and, for a state of our size and population, this certainly represents a tremendous commitment on the part of our people and our leaders to try to bring state-supported higher educational opportunity to the people. We have over 6,000 full-time faculty members in our institutions, and over 1,500 part-time faculty. We are offering something over 1,700 different educational programs and our educational plant is now valued at about $350 million. We rank near the top of the states in the percentage of our young people going on to higher education and, certainly among the top of the states in the percentage of the students that we are serving through state-supported higher education. We are making a tremendous effort and I am very pleased.

We recognize that for a long time we have been behind in the amount of money that we would like to be spending per student in higher education in Oklahoma. Trying to reach that many students through that many institutions dilutes an educational dollar and makes it all the more important that we have adequate support. But we have, in the past two years, made progress. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, Oklahoma has ranked fourth in the nation for two years in a row in the percentage of increase of state support for higher education. Having seen sometimes double-digit numbers describing our ranking, this is good news indeed, that we rank fourth in the nation. We have increased our appropriations significantly. We have had a 44 percent increase in state funding for higher education in Oklahoma over a two year period, as compared with 24 percent as the national average. The Chronicle says at least 10 states, and this is a very sad statistic, have fallen behind when inflation is considered, having smaller appropriations for higher education over the past two years than they had entering the period.

I'm very pleased to report that in Oklahoma, considering enrollment increases and inflation over the past two years, we have gained on inflation. In terms of real dollars, our educational program has had an increase of 24 percent, far outstripping inflation. We feel that we have made some great strides. We're going to do our best to continue to have increases in funding that will enable us to stay ahead of inflation and to make real gains in terms of educational programs.

In Oklahoma we now face some of the challenges common to other systems of higher education across the country. For years, we have had to concentrate on trying to bring a higher educational opportunity to every young person who wanted it.

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Now we are in a situation in which we have largely done that job and done it very well. Much of the credit for the accomplishment should go to our Chancellor, Dr. E. T. Dunlap, because he has provided the leadership necessary to meet the tremendous challenge of enrollment growth in the 1960's and early 1970's.

Now we face another challenge, to bring the highest possible quality of educational programs to our people, to reach out in areas where we have a solid foundation, to build for excellence. I don't need to tell you that this is a very difficult task, one that puts a tremendous burden on a Chancellor or a chief executive officer in higher education and the Board of Regents or the coordinating board for a state system. In developing budgeting, our Chancellor has been one of the leaders in the nation. Devising and implementing a system that recognizes program budgeting needs certainly requires a great deal of political courage. It's much easier to give an equal amount of money per student to all educational institutions than it is to assess excellence and worth, and set some priorities for the development of certain educational programs. Whenever you do that, you have to make some judgments among institutions, citing certain programs in certain institutions as areas where excellence can be achieved because they have a head start. We have to build on those kinds of programs and this means, of course, disappointing some within the higher educational system. It also means having to deal with those who represent those constituencies in the legislature and in other places where political pressures are brought to bear.

And so in Oklahoma, having gone through a period of time in which we have reached out for numbers to bring educational opportunity to all, we are now entering a very critical period of time. I am happy we have come to this point at which we are having, in essence, to pick and choose, to set priorities, to reach for areas of excellence in certain institutions and in certain program areas. This requires teaching others why we need to do it. It means that the institutional governing boards have to be very broad in their view of the state's interest, that they cannot be parochial, that they cannot see themselves entirely as representatives of particular institutions. And it means that there must be a leadership that has the ability to communicate with members of the legislature and others about the total needs of the state.

Because it is the system of higher education that really sets the tone of where a state is going, I think it is a responsibility of a system of higher education to try to determine what perspectives are needed, and this might not be a matter necessarily of narrow professional training, and to try to develop those programs in higher education. Since none of us have the dollars that we would like to have, we need to look at how well higher eduation is meeting the needs of the state.

We have a new Education Council in Oklahoma on which we have representation from the Legislature, the chairmen of the committees on higher and common education, the Chancellor of Higher Education, the vo-tech and common education leadership, three lay citizens, and the Governor. We try to look at the overall needs of the educational community in the state of Oklahoma, trying to draw all of these programs together.

One of the things we notice, for example, is that we are turning out in Oklahoma more teachers than we can absorb because of the great size of our teacher education programs. We have had excellent programs in teacher education in the past but now are turning out far more teachers than we can absorb. I think this represents an opportunity, in some respect, because it means that we can raise the standards and be more selective about those who enter the teaching profession. I think this is one of the responsibilities of higher education. We have been very selective about those that we allowed to enter nursing, or medicine or law, but we've not always set very high academic standards for those who wanted to go into teaching. But I don't need to tell any of you the practical problems that we confront at the same time. When there are departments that can justify their being only as student enrollments remain large or face retrenchment, to become more selective in student admissions means reducing the numbers. No faculty, no department of any college or institution of higher education wants to volunteer itself to be the first one retrenched by reordering the admissions process for those who go into that particular field.

We have to find new ways of approaching the problem. For example, we found that one of the greatest needs in our public school system in Oklahoma was the need for advanced training and inservice training for those who are in the classroom now. They need constantly to be able to upgrade their skills as teachers. There needs to be more specialized training for some of our teachers in the common school system with emphasis on programs, for example, that help young people learn to read. Where can the expertise be found to

provide inservice training at the elementary and secondary level that is so badly needed? It could come from the universities, by the shifing of resources. Higher education needs to be adaptable to the changing needs and must be, so we can utilize the people we have, without sufferiing painful retrenchments in the sizes of faculties. Rather, we can simply reorder priorities somewhat, using our professors of education and their skills to go into the common and secondary education systems to provide some of the vital inservice training and upgrading of present faculties and staffs there. This approach would cause no real economic dislocation, keeping the higher education service and skills intact, and yet provide a service that more directly meets the actual needs of the total educational system in our state at this time.

These are the creative ways that I think we need to look at streching our educational resources, finding ways around difficult adjustments, using our skilled people, not putting them out of work, and yet meeting the needs of the people.

These are the kinds of things that all of us are going to be called upon to look at with greater intensity as the dollars become harder and harder to obtain. We must find new programs that will provide excellence at low cost. One of the programs that we have been working on in Oklahoma that I am very excited about is the Scholar Leadership Program. Because we do not have huge private endowments, we realize that our state supported higher education has a difficult time competing with the nation's outstanding private institutions that have hundreds of millions of dollars in private endowments that can attract the Nobel prize winners to become permanent members of the faculty, and be able to pay them a hundred thousand dollars (or more) a year. We can't do that in state supported institutions, but we can bring these people to our campuses for brief periods to give our students a first-hand experience with the greatest minds of the country. By using our financial resources in this way, we can pay rather good stipends for a week or a two week period. So we have begun to do this. The Scholar Leadership Enrichment Program which is centered at the University of Oklahoma, attracts the brightest and best of our students in their junior and senior years. These students enroll in a seminar course led by a local faculty member. To this seminar come six or seven of the finest minds in the country in an interdisciplinary program. The students do their reading ahead of time, led by the local faculty member, so that when the visiting lecturer comes, they are already prepared to get the most from what that person has to say in the classroom. And through our Talkback Television system, we have taken these small seminar appearances to leadership groups also enrolled in seminars in our other institutions of higher education across the state. Those students, through the medium of television, have the same kind of experience of being able to ask questions and sit in on what becomes a small and intimate seminar situation with outstanding scholars. Then of course, they are also available for lectures and enrichment to the general community. This is just one of the ways in which we are trying to stretch the education dollar in Oklahoma.

And I think, after all, that is the duty of a system of higher education. Just because we are a state system gives us no excuse to fail to challenge the best minds that come into our state supported institutions. I think it is possible for use, though maybe not in every single way, to duplicate the educational experience of the very heavily endowed private institutions. Through new and innovative approaches we can come very close to providing the same degree of intellectual challenge and stimulation, if we will just do so. But it does require leadership of the chief executive officers in higher education and of the members of the state coordinating board who are sensitive to the fact that we are doing a disservice if we do not identify in our higher educational institutions programs for excellence, programs that will challenge the best and brightest of our students, and find new ways of bringing in the best minds in the country to allow students to have experience with them.

It can be done but it requires the leadership of the coordinating board and it requires a willingness to communicate to the public why it is important to them, what it means to the future leadership of a state or a community.

That is another of the responsibilities of higher education —to provide the intellectual challenge and stimulation that will create the kind of far-sighted leadership that a state is going to need in the future. I think if there is any area in which we have perhaps fallen down in higher education, not only in the public sector but in the private sector as well in this country, it has been our failure to bring our talents to bear as fully as they should on the public problems of the time. It is really a problem of translation and very often unfortunately, the higher educational community has been somewhat divorced from the day to day decisions of those who are in policy-making positions.

Utilizing the knowledge that a faculty member has in making a decision in a community, whether it's at the city council, the local school board, the state legislature, wherever it may happen to be, is really a job of translation. People talk very often about the ivory tower, the lack of practicality of those in the academic community. When we use those terms, what we're really saying is that some kind of gulf has developed and somehow we must bridge that gap. The greatest need of our age is to bring to bear in the community that perspective, that knowledge, that judgment, which can be found in the academic communities in the country. It's very frustrating for faculty members to have the patience and take the time to translate a concept they understand into language that the lay person can grasp and utilize to make a decision. But that job of translation is our greatest challenge, frustrating as it is, hard as it is; that is what we must be about. If we're going to have the kind of financial support that our institutions of higher education need and deserve, we must constantly do a better job of translating our knowledge into a useful form that can be brought to bear in making decisions.

One of the things that we're going to work on very hard this year in Oklahoma is to bring our institutions of higher education more directly into policy-making. Very often we stumble through problems in the state legislature; we make important decisions for the future of the state without really knowing what we're doing and without calling upon the expertise that's available in our own institutions of higher education. I served for four years on a committee of the legislature dealing with the environment and I remember that we spent two years debating a bill that would have banned phosphates in detergents of certain kinds. We sat around and talked to each other. There was not a single scientist on the committee, not one person who really knew what a phosphate was. This was the level of our expertise. Not once did any of us think of calling on some of the experts who were available at our own universities, people who could have come in and given us professional, unbiased testimony as to what might be best in making a decision of this kind.

We have done a little better recently on some of the changes that we're making in our correctional system. We've undergone massive changes in Oklahoma, but even there, I would say candidly, that we've not called upon the expertise available in our own universities, some of those who have been breaking new ground in the field of human psychology. These people need to be called upon and utilized. The more that we can bring to bear the knowledge and the skill of our faculties of higher education in solving the problems and making the decisions for our society, the better informed our decisions will be and the better directed our efforts and resources will be.

And, I would suspect, at the same time, the more commitment we will see to higher education itself. A legislator, who has the experience of having a faculty member sit on a committee more or less as a volunteer or part-time staff resource to the committee, quickly learns to appreciate how much skill and knowledge the product of our higher educational institutions is worth to him or to her as a policy-maker. And this is badly, badly needed.

I see another development in our society and it's one that disturbs me greatly. It is what I call the breakdown of the sense of community in this country. Go back and look at the beginnings of our political system. There are embodied in our political system two very divergent and contradictory concepts. First, in forming our government, in drafting the Constitution, and in writing our Bill of Rights, the founders of this country expressed a belief in certain inalienable natural rights of the individual. Americans believe that no one, for example, should be denied the right of free speech or property fairly acquired or the right to free worship. If you ask Americans, "Do you believe in inalienable, individual rights that government cannot change?", the average American would say, "Yes, I do. These rights pre-exist, they pre-date government."

On the other hand, we profess a belief in another principle, the principle of majority rule, that it is the majority that should decide all questions in our political system. Of course, the problem is, who decides when the individual's rights have been trampled upon? Is it the majority? If we leave it strictly to the majority to decide when the rights of the minority have not been protected, there will be no real protection for the minority. So, these two principles have been in conflict, in tension, since the very beginning of our society: the principle that not even a majority has the right to take away certain things from the individual and the principle of majority rule itself. I think that is one of the reasons why the Supreme Court has been such a controversial institution in our society. It has tried to bridge the gap between our belief in the rights of the individual, no matter how unpopular that individual might happen to be, the right to speak freely for a very unpopular cause, for example, and our devotion to the principle of majority rule. Into that gap has come the Supreme Court.

It is remarkable that as inconsistent as these two beliefs are, our society has stayed together so well, has worked so harmoniously. How few of us are really aware that there is a basic and innate contradiction—a stress—right at the center of our political fabric? Why? I would suggest that it's because the majority that has ruled this country from its beginnings as a nation has been a good majority, a sensitive majority, a majority that has said, "I may not agree with what you have said but I will defend to the death your right to say it." It has been a majority that has had a town hall meeting spirit—what Rousseau called the General Will—with people listening intently to each other and everyone sincerely trying to understand the other person's needs and point of view. It has been a majority that has voted with sensitivity, a majority that considered the common good over and above personal self-interest. That is what has held our country together and given it its driving force, the fact that so many Americans, in exercising their political powers as part of the majority, have done so, putting the common good first and their individual self-interest second.

In our society today I think we see a tendency toward the break-up of this spirit of community. In some respects it is falling apart. I can see it where I sit. We see it, for example, in those who come to government seeking services. People begin to have a feeling, that rather than having identity as a human being, as an American, or as a member of the community first, that "I am a farmer, I am a doctor, I am a policeman, I am a fireman, or a teacher." And once that kind of smaller group identity begins to take charge over the broader identity as a member of the total community, dangerous cycles begin to erupt. Soon the firemen are organizing, trying to get all they can, because the policemen organized to get all they could, because the teachers organized, because the factory workers organized, an so on and so on. Then we begin to try to make decisions from the point of view of balancing out the interests of groups, rather than coming together as one community motivated by the perspective of what's good for all of us.

That is the reason I said the great challenge of higher education today is the challenge of translation, not only of the knowledge but also of the perspective that the academic community can bring to all of us in the broader community. Where else can that higher perspective come from? Where can that understanding come from? Where does that empathy develop, that understanding of that person across the room, who is not at all like me, who doesn't belong to the same economic group or the same professional group or perhaps the same racial group, or is of a different sex, or a different station in life? It has to come from our system of higher education. Our system of higher education has been the greatest teacher of the value of tolerance of any institution in our society. What can bring us together and hold together this sense of community? It must be the leadership of higher education, the willingness of those who are involved in it to attend the town hall meeting, tolerate the frustrations of those who will have the patience to stay, translate and try to persuade and convince as to the right direction that society should go. The challenge that we have in a rapidly changing world is the challenge to be a full member of the community and yet to stand just enough apart to provide that independent perspective and independent judgment that is needed as an objective standard for the rest of the community to observe.

These are not easy times, changing as much as they are. They are times of specialization to the extent that many people understand each other even less than they did in the previous generation. Into this gap must come higher education. Into this gap must come executive officers and regents who understand why it is important to build programs for excellence, why it is important to find new and creative ways of using the resources that are already developed to interrelate with the total community. That's our job. And it's not an easy one. As I look around our state and see the people in leadership in higher education, I'm convinced that it is a job that can be done. Because I have great confidence in the quality of the leadership of higher education in this country, I have great confidence in our future.